

## **ALDER CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

### **1. THE STUDY AREA - 5,142 acres**

The Alder Creek WSA (NV-020-600D) is located in northwest Nevada in Humboldt County, about a 6 hour drive northeast of Reno. It includes 5,142 acres of public lands. .

The WSA is bordered on the east by the Big Onion-Rodeo Flat Road, on the south by the Rodeo Flat-Knott Creek Reservoir Connecting Road, on the west by the Knott Creek Reservoir Road and on the north by the Alder Creek Big-Onion Road.

The Alder Creek WSA lies on the west flank of a mountainous north-south tending range with a predominantly sagebrush steppe ecosystem mixed with a smaller amount of subalpine and riparian zones. The landform is steep to rolling with many granitic rock outcrops scattered throughout and contains coniferous stands in the higher elevations. Elevations range from 5,600 feet to 7,900 feet.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

The recommendation for this WSA is to release all 5,142 acres for uses other than wilderness. All wilderness is considered to be the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long-term. Although the recommendation is not the all wilderness alternative, the recommendation for this WSA would be implemented in a manner which would utilize all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts. The Draft EIS Proposed Action differed from the present recommendation in that 4,000 acres were preliminarily recommended for wilderness. It was felt, however, that the loss of wilderness values associated with the development of adjacent private land, coupled with the relatively small size of the area, did not make this WSA a good candidate for wilderness management.

Although the Alder Creek WSA has a natural landscape with good scenery, its small size and configuration restrict the space usable for primitive and unconfined recreation. The landscape is extremely open and visibility is often extensive which is detrimental to some recreation opportunities and values. In addition, the size is inadequate to lessen the impacts of offsite influences on solitude. The boundary roads lead people to Onion Valley, Little Onion and Knott Creek Reservoirs, some of the most popular recreation areas in the Winnemucca District. The recommendation recognizes that while the area has high recreation values, its size would make it difficult, if not impossible, to manage wilderness values over the long term.

The small size and the influences on wilderness values by numerous diverse activities in the area contribute to a lack of potential to effectively manage the area as wilderness.

### **3. WILDERNESS CHARACTERISTICS**

**A. Naturalness:** The Alder Creek WSA is predominantly natural. It lies on the west flank of a mountainous north-south tending range with a predominantly sagebrush steppe ecosystem mixed with subalpine and riparian zones and with coniferous stands in the higher elevations. The landform is steep to rolling with many granitic rock outcrops scattered throughout. Elevations range from 5,600 feet to 7,900 feet.

There are only a few range improvements, roads and ways which are generally on the periphery of the WSA. The study area has approximately one mile of way and 1.4 miles of fence. Outside sights and sounds are presently restricted to light vehicular traffic and recreational use around Onion Valley (Big Onion), Little Onion and Knott Creek Reservoirs. The overall influence of human imprints within the WSA, as seen by the visitor, is negligible.

**B. Solitude:** The Alder Creek WSA presently offers outstanding opportunities for solitude in some areas. The rugged broken landform and (in spots) dense vegetation provide excellent screening for visitors. That portion of the WSA in the vicinity of Knott Creek Reservoir, however, is expected to have severe solitude problems caused by the number of people who recreate in the area. The boundary roads are heavily used by fishermen and, in the fall by hunters. The influences of outside sights and sounds were not analyzed in the Initial or Intensive Inventories.

**C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation:** Alder Creek WSA, in conjunction with the adjacent Blue Lakes WSA, provides some of the best primitive recreation in northwest Nevada. The WSA has excellent opportunities for day-hiking, backpacking (in conjunction with the contiguous Blue Lakes WSA), hunting, fishing, horse-packing and nature study. The highly scenic landform, due to the varied vegetation, granitic landforms and abundant water, and numerous attractions all enhance the primitive recreation opportunities. For hunters, significant wildlife habitat is present, offering them opportunities to obtain trophy sized mule deer, sage grouse and mountain lions. The proximity to the Blue Lakes WSA and the lack of similar landscapes in the region makes the Alder Creek WSA particularly attractive to recreationists.

**D. Special Features:** Although no threatened or endangered plants are known to occur here, the WSA's variety of vegetation types is considered scenic and botanically interesting. This includes a disjunct population of limber pine (i.e., separated from their main population, which can lead to genetic variation), extensive stands of mountain mahogany and lush riparian zones. Tree ring research studies have been conducted within the WSA which have helped to show ages of the trees as well as the history of climatic changes and other various natural occurrences.

#### **4. MANAGEABILITY**

The study area is capable of being managed as wilderness. There are management concerns associated with the small size and configuration of the study area and the easy ORV access (one-fifth of the WSA).

#### **5. ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCE VALUES**

There is a 20-acre pre-FLPMA mining claim. There is no present production of any mineral or geothermal resource in the study area. The following conclusion was determined: 200 acres have moderate metallic mineral potential (uranium). In summary, quantities of mineral resources are unknown but there is moderate potential on 200 acres for uranium.

#### **6. SUMMARY OF WSA-SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

Since the Alder Creek WSA was formed from parts of other study areas, any comments made concerning it during the initial and intensive inventory phases cannot be distinguished from comments made regarding other areas.

During the 90-day comment period for the Draft Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement, three formal public hearings were held in Nevada (Gerlach on November 1, Winnemucca on November 3 and Reno on November 8, 1983). Of the seventeen oral comments received, nine people supported more wilderness than the draft EIS Proposed Action of 4,000 acres recommended for wilderness designation. Seven people supported the draft EIS Proposed Action and one person wanted no wilderness. Of the fifty written comments received, two people supported more wilderness than the draft EIS proposed action, forty supported the action and eight supported less than the 4,000 acres. Since then the Proposed Action has been changed to no wilderness.